

Henning Börm  
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# Commutatio et Contentio

Studies in the Late Roman, Sasanian,  
and Early Islamic Near East

In Memory of Zeey Rubin

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In Memory of Zeev Rubin

edited by

Henning Börm and Josef Wiesehöfer

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# Achaemenid and Seleucid Royal Funerary Practices and Middle Iranian Kingship

*Matthew P. Canepa (Minneapolis)*

## Introduction

In this study, dedicated to the memory of Zeev Rubin, I explore one important facet of Iranian kingship between Alexander and Islam: the art and ritual of Achaemenid and Seleucid funerary monuments and their impact on later Macedonian and Middle Iranian kingship in Western and South Asia.\* The relationship of Achaemenid royal traditions to those of their Hellenistic and Iranian successors is one of the perennial problems of the Middle Iranian period, and impacts this topic as well. I explore to what extent – if at all – did Seleucid and Middle Iranian monumental and ritual practices engage the traditions of the Achaemenids, and to what extent were new royal practices created and ‘Iranized’, with contemporary Macedonian, steppe nomadic or even South Asian royal traditions appropriated as raw material.

In this and related studies, I have found it important to critically examine the relationship between cultural identity and the evidence of art and ritual encountered in the evidence. Rather than assuming any inherent Iranian, ‘Persian’, or, much less, Zoroastrian quality to the architectural forms or rituals themselves, this study focuses on Middle Iranian kingship as a contested – and malleable – collection of practices that several different peoples appropriated and manipulated to appeal to both global and local audiences.<sup>1</sup> Thus it is just as important to focus on forces of rupture in Iranian culture and attempts on the part of Iranian regimes to reinvigorate – or even reinvent – past traditions as search for evidence of continuity. From this point of view

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<sup>1</sup> On the problem of cross-cultural interaction: Canepa 2010a.

Iranian kingship, Iranian royal identity was something that was constantly enacted and recreated and could be modified, contested or erased.<sup>2</sup>

## The Achaemenid Heritage

Achaemenid Persian kingship impacted the development of Middle Iranian royal culture; however, not in the manner understood by early scholarship, which drew a developmental line from Persian royal ritual to that of the Hellenistic kings, and which still sometimes haunts classical studies scholarship. Some of the classic tropes, such as the use of the diadem, demands for full prostration (*proskynēsis*) from courtiers, or a »god-like« king honored with *isotheos timos*, find no corroboration in contemporary Persian primary sources, though Alexander certainly demanded them.<sup>3</sup> Similarly no Persian primary sources attest that the Achaemenids developed anything resembling a cult of deceased kings, a »ruler cult« focused on the living kings empire-wide or in Pārsa, or dynastic sanctuaries of the sort that emerged in Iranian lands after Alexander.<sup>4</sup>

The Achaemenids deposited the bodies of their deceased kings in the regions around three sites in the province of Pārsa, the symbolic core of their empire: Pasargadae, Naqš-e Rostam and Persepolis.<sup>5</sup> Other monuments in the territory of ancient Pārsa and near satrapal capitals reflect the traditions of the kings of kings. The Achaemenid rulers cultivated two succeeding traditions of funerary architecture. The first tradition, as found at Pasargadae, was characterized by a monumental, free-standing structure made of ashlar masonry set atop a plinth. Fully developed in the tomb of Cyrus the Great at Pasargadae, the site integrated the tomb into a larger palatial and garden

2 Canepa 2009, 7–8; Canepa 2010b, 121–154.

3 Reflecting the »Greek« view of Achaemenid court culture provided by Greek literature: Ritter 1965. See the comments of Josef Wiesehöfer on this tradition of historiography (Wiesehöfer 2006).

4 Briant 2002, 675–680, 915 and 998–999; Stronach 1985, 605–627; Schippmann 1971. Cf. Mary Boyce 1975 and Boyce 1975–1991, vol. 2, 216–231. Boyce's oft-repeated theory of an Achaemenid temple cult of fire as well as the expectation that there would be official Achaemenid temple architecture rests on a passage from the *Babylonica* of Berossos, who reports that Artaxerxes II »... was the first to set up an image of Aphrodite Anaitis in Babylon and to require such worship from the Susians, Ecbatanians, Persians and Bactrians and from Damascus and Sardis« (Burstein 1978, 29). But Berossos does not mention temples and no archaeological evidence of official Achaemenid image or fire temples has been discovered.

5 The most important archaeological study to date is Huff 2004.

complex.<sup>6</sup> The main monuments of Pasargadae consisted of palatial buildings with an associated garden (*paradeisos*), a »sacred area,« with a structure of unknown function, an artificial terrace, which could have hosted religious activities, and the tomb.<sup>7</sup> The tomb was constructed of ashlar masonry on a high, six-tiered plinth with a gabled roof measuring 10.60 m high, 13.20 m long, and 12.20 m wide, with an inner tomb chamber 2.10 m high, 3.20 m long, and 2.20 m wide.<sup>8</sup> All four monumental clusters were arranged on a ca. 2.30 kilometer long northeast-southwest axis with the palace/garden area roughly in the middle between the terrace to the north and the tomb to the southeast.

A number of related tomb monuments dating to the period after Cyrus the Great present similar features. On the plain of Persepolis rose an unfinished structure, known variously as the Takt-e Rostam or Takt-e Gohar, which appears to be an exact copy of the tomb of Cyrus.<sup>9</sup> Similar to Pasargadae, a palatial structure was built on the same orientation as the tomb.<sup>10</sup> A smaller structure at the site of Bozpār in Fārs outside the royal cities reflects the architecture of the tomb of Cyrus. Known locally as the Gor-e Dokhtar it measures 4.45 m high, 5.10 m long, and 4.40 m wide.<sup>11</sup> A tomb with a pyramidal tiered plinth discovered in Sardis bore such resemblance to the Persian tombs that scholars have suggested that it was built by a Persian or with Persian inspiration.<sup>12</sup>

As in many other arenas of Persian kingship where he introduced new forms, Darius I (522 to 486 BCE) innovated a new type of Achaemenid funerary monument. Darius I carved a cruciform tomb monument into the living rock at Naqš-e Rostam. The upper portion of the monument carried relief sculpture of personifications of all provinces of the empire supporting a throne, which in turn supported a scene of the king of kings standing before a fire altar in communication with a symbol of the Great God Ahura Mazda. The interior of the tomb, entered through a rock-cut façade evoking a hypostyle Persian palace with bull-protome columns, contained the rock-cut sarcophaguses of the king of kings and his family. At Naqš-e Ros-

<sup>6</sup> Stronach 1978; Stronach 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Tomb: Kleiss 1979, pl. 44.

<sup>8</sup> Stronach 1978, 24–41.

<sup>9</sup> Two secondary burials were found inside; see Krefter 1979, 13–25 and 24.

<sup>10</sup> Tilia 1978, 73.

<sup>11</sup> Vanden Berghe 1964, 243–258; Vanden Berghe 1989; Nylander 1966; Shahbazi 1972.

<sup>12</sup> Kleiss 1996.

tam, Darius built a replica of the tower at Pasargadae and subsequently the site evolved into the Achaemenid necropolis *par excellence*. All subsequent Achaemenid kings replicated the form and size of Darius I's tomb, as well as the content and iconography of its relief sculpture, only varying the number of rock-cut sarcophagi according to the number of members of the royal family.<sup>13</sup> Three other kings of kings were carving their tombs at Naqš-e Rostam, two more kings commissioned similar tombs in the cliffs behind Persepolis.

Other than the Achaemenid tombs themselves we have no primary source evidence on Achaemenid mortuary practices. The exact extent to which Zoroastrianism informed or governed Achaemenid funerary practices is not entirely clear. However, like Achaemenid religion in general, the textual and archaeological evidence indicates that ancient Iranian religious traditions, political exigencies and nascent Zoroastrianism all impacted their development to certain extents.<sup>14</sup> While evidence from the Avesta and orthodox Zoroastrianism as established by the Sasanians is more abundant, and it is important not to anachronistically check the Achaemenid evidence for orthodoxy against them, certain correspondences are quite compelling. As has been often noted, the tombs themselves, be they a plinth tomb like that of Cyrus or a rock-cut tomb like that of Darius and his successors, would have ritually protected the sacred elements from contamination from the human remains (Av. *nasu-*).<sup>15</sup> Tertiary evidence, in this case Greek literature, indicates that the bodies of the Achaemenid kings were embalmed, covered in wax and deposited whole along with rich clothing and furniture.<sup>16</sup> The rock-cut sarcophaguses indeed are of a size that would accommodate a human body and confirm, at least in this aspect, that Achaemenid royal mortuary practices differed from strictures in the Zoroastrian religious texts that call for the body's flesh to be removed and only the disarticulated bones to be interred in an ossuary.

While the form of the royal tombs changed, contemporary evidence indicates that similar ritual activities took place at all of them. Elamite tablets

<sup>13</sup> One of the Achaemenid tombs is securely attributed to Darius I by its inscription. Schmidt attributed the others to Xerxes I, Artaxerxes I, and Darius II on the basis of relative wear and style, though this dating is far from secure; see Schmidt 1970, 79–107.

<sup>14</sup> Recent critical studies of Achaemenid religion with an eye towards the use of the Avestan concepts: Skjærvø 2005; Lincoln 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Hutter 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Hdt. 1.140; Strabo 14.3.20; Arrian 6.29.4–7.

from the Persepolis Fortification Archive refer to the funerary monuments (*šumar*) of the Achaemenid kings and cult rendered at them for the benefit of the king's soul.<sup>17</sup> Officials (Elamite *lipite kutip*; associated with the Old Persian title *vačabara* »chamberlain«) were drawn from the nobility and charged with serving as »keepers of the tombs« (Elamite *šumar nuškip*) and ensuring that sacrifices were offered at the tombs.<sup>18</sup> These officials had a cadre of servants, in the Elamite tablets termed *lubap* and *puhu*, to assist them in caring for the royal tombs, for whom they received rations of grain or flour, wine and cattle for their upkeep as well as for the sacrifices themselves.<sup>19</sup> Paralleling the Elamite tablets, Ctesias mentions several high officials who were charged by the subsequent king with bringing the body of the deceased ruler to Persia proper and who tended the tomb for years afterwards.<sup>20</sup> Arrian reports that within the precincts of Cyrus' tomb, »there was a small house created for the Magoi who cared for Cyrus' tomb since the time of Cyrus' son, Cambyses, and who received the stewardship from father to son. Every day they were given by the king a sheep, fine white flour, wine and, each month, a horse, to sacrifice for Cyrus.«<sup>21</sup> The Persepolis Fortification tablets, Hellenistic literary sources, and archaeological evidence indicate that the sacrifices themselves rendered for the Achaemenid kings did not correspond to later »orthodox Zoroastrian« practices or gods, though the basic intention of making offerings for the benefit of the deceased does. It is important to stress that these sacrifices were intended for the benefit of the soul of the king and not to the king himself.

<sup>17</sup> Studies of primary sources attesting to the institution of the royal tombs, cult and their caretakers in Achaemenid times: Henkelman 2003; Henkelman 2008, 287–291, 429–432 and 546; Tuplin 2008; Canepa 2010c.

<sup>18</sup> Henkelman studies the phenomenon in four tablets: NN 1700, NN 1848, NN 2174 and Fort. 2512. See Henkelman 2003, 117–129.

<sup>19</sup> Henkelman 2003, 139–140. For example: »[...] Issue 600, quarts of grain (to) the men who (are) keepers of the *šumar* of Hystaspes (at) Persepolis, to them (as) rations for the servants [...]«, NN 1848, lines 3–10, trans. Henkelman, 104. »[...] Issue 24, head of small cattle to them, Bakabadda *cum suis* who are making [...] (at) the *šumar* of Cambyses and the woman Upanduš at Narezzaš«, NN 2174, lines 1–8.

<sup>20</sup> For example: »Immediately after his accession he [Cambyses] sent his [Cyrus's] body by the eunuch Bagapates to Persia for burial, and in all other respects carried out his father's wishes«, Ctesias, frg. 13.9; Henkelman 2003, 155 (no. 101).

<sup>21</sup> Arrian 6.29.4–14, cf. Strabo 15.3–7.

## New Iranian Royal Funerary Practices after the Macedonian Conquest

Alexander's overthrow of the Achaemenid dynasty and the establishment of Macedonian kingdoms on the lands of the Persian empire was one of the greatest ruptures in Iranian culture. From the very start of his invasion Alexander was attuned to Achaemenid traditions, strategies of legitimization and modes of governance, and formulated his own claims in reaction to them.<sup>22</sup> Alexander sought, in his own way, to portray himself as a legitimate successor to Darius III, and left in place many Achaemenid political structures. Yet, while Alexander had basic knowledge of Achaemenid royal ideology and practices, that knowledge was imperfect, shaped by equally imperfect Greek impressions and stereotypes of the Persian kings, not to mention Alexander's ambitions to be something more than *›just‹* a Persian king of kings.<sup>23</sup> He was never *›consecrated‹* as an Achaemenid king of kings any more than an Egyptian pharaoh or a Babylonian king of lands, as in all cases this would have limited the scope of his kingship.<sup>24</sup> Far from a king who sought to seamlessly incorporate himself into the Achaemenid model,<sup>25</sup> Alexander appropriated and manipulated those aspects of Persian royal practice that suited him and invented or ignored the rest. His engagement with Persian funerary traditions and monuments are consonant with this larger pattern, and his rare attempts to engage Persian royal traditions more often than not backfired.<sup>26</sup>

In the few recorded instances of Alexander's symbolic use of Achaemenid sites he either departed from Persian tradition completely or presented an improvised interpretation and use.<sup>27</sup> Alexander largely kept the symbolic power of the monuments of Pārsa at arms length, fitting with his definition of himself as king of Asia, not king of the Persians. However, one Achaemenid structure in the region played a positive role in his nascent propaganda program. In a gesture that would have only affected the local Persian population, Alexander made a show of caring for the tomb of Cyrus to

<sup>22</sup> Wiesehöfer 1996, 105.

<sup>23</sup> Stewart 1993, 171–181.

<sup>24</sup> There is no evidence of a *›consecration‹* or coronation at Pasargadae, nor an enthronement at Susa; see Bosworth 1980, 5.

<sup>25</sup> Wiemer 2007.

<sup>26</sup> For example his clumsy and portentous demand that all fires be extinguished after the death of Hephaestion (Diod. 17.114.4–5).

<sup>27</sup> Persepolis: Diod. 17.72.1; Curt. Ruf. 5.6.19–20. Susa: Arrian 3.16.6–10; Diod. 17.66.1–2; Justin 11.14.6–10; Curt. Ruf. 5.1.17–27.

loosely associate himself with the founder of the empire. It appears he left in place the tomb's priestly caretakers, though not before brutally torturing them to see if they had pilfered the tomb.<sup>28</sup> After Alexander, Pasargadae and the tomb of Cyrus recede from sight, as do the tombs of Naqš-e Rostam.<sup>29</sup> His own funerary preparations, burial and subsequent cult were the result of the activities and claims of his successors, especially Ptolemaic Egypt.

### Seleucid Funerary Monuments and Ritual

The royal traditions of the Seleucid dynasty (312 to 64 BCE) impacted the development of Middle Iranian kingship. After Seleukos I had been murdered by Ptolemy Keraunos, Philetairos, the governor of Pergamon, ransomed the body, cremated it at Pergamon and sent the remains to Antiochos I.<sup>30</sup> Responding, no doubt, to Ptolemy I's precedent of the Sema of Alexandria, Antiochos I established his father's remains in Seleukeia Pieria, creating within the grounds of the royal district (*basileia*) a temple for them. Rather than being modeled on a *heroön*, the Nikatoreion, as it was called, had the trappings of a cult site dedicated to an Olympic god: it was a *temenos* with a *naos* to Seleukos.<sup>31</sup> Excavations at Seleukeia Pieria uncovered a large Doric peripteral temple (37 x 19 m), built without an *opisthodomos*.<sup>32</sup> Instead, the temple had the unusual feature of an enclosed area at the end of the *cella* (an *adyton*) that controlled access to a flight of stairs which led down to a crypt. This suggests that this structure was the mausoleum-*naos* of the Nikatoreion. We do not have evidence of the funerals or burial places of the other Seleucid kings; however, it is possible that legitimate sovereigns received similar honors either at the Nikatoreion in Seleukeia Pieria, or at their own *temenos* in another city. The Nikatoreion of Seleukeia Pieria was not the genesis or core of an empire-wide cult like the Sema of Alexandria. Rather, it appears that the traditions of the local cult site were later made to conform to the official dynastic cult, which was instituted first by Antio-

<sup>28</sup> Arrian 6.29.4–14, cf. Strabo 15.3–7. Studies of primary sources attesting to the institution of the royal tombs, cult and their caretakers in Achaemenid times: Henkelman 2003, Henkelman 2008, 287–291, 429–432 and 546.

<sup>29</sup> Boucharlat 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Appian *Syr.* 63.

<sup>31</sup> Alonso 2009, 293. Related is the sanctuary of the Seleucid divine dynastic founder, Apollo, also in Syria, at Daphne.

<sup>32</sup> Stillwell 1941, 33–34; Hannestad/Potts 1990, 116.

chos III, beginning in 209 and then fully by 204.<sup>33</sup> A fragmentary inscription from Seleukeia Pieria records the annual priesthoods for the city, which include priests of the deceased Seleucid kings and the living king, indicating they received cultic devotion in the city.<sup>34</sup>

Archaeological evidence of the phenomenon of dedicating a funerary *temenos* based architecturally on a sanctuary of an Olympic god and focused on a temple with crypt, occurs at Ai Khanum (Ay Kanom) in Bactria. While we do not know the ancient name of the city of Ai Khanum, the weight of the archaeological and numismatic evidence indicates that the city was one of Seleukos I's foundations, founded sometime in the late fourth century BCE. After 250 BCE it grew under the independent Diodotid and Euthydemid kings until its destruction by nomadic invaders ca. 150 BCE. Like the Nikatoreion of the palace of Seleukeia Pieria, Ai Khanum's palatial district incorporated two funerary *temenoi* containing temples with crypts, burials and evidence of cult activity. The oldest was dedicated to the city founder, and the later to Bactria's new royal family. Reminiscent of the Seleucid's adaptation of Persian palatial design, the *temenoi* occur inside the palatial precinct, though not inside the palace itself. A visitor would reach the central palace only by travelling through a series of gatehouses and grand corridors.<sup>35</sup> After passing through the main gate the visitor would pass into a corridor that gave access to the palace and sacred precincts. To the south of the corridor lay the *temenos* of the city founder Kineas, built as a simple Doric temple, as well as the city's temple to Zeus, reconstructed several times over the life of the city – always on a non-Greek plan.<sup>36</sup> The *cella* of the mausoleum-*naos* of Kineas contained a conduit from the structure's *cella* to the crypt's main sarcophagus and revealed clear evidence that libations were repeatedly poured over the city-founder's remains. This indicates that it served as a cultic focus for at least one portion of the city's population.<sup>37</sup>

Within a separate enclosure to the northeast of the corridor rose a larger and more elaborate temple-like structure that similarly contained multiple burials.<sup>38</sup> Its two-phased construction dates later than that of Kineas. The structure was one of the grandest buildings in the city, built in the most pres-

33 Van Nuffelen 2004, 284.

34 OGIS 245. Cohen 1995, 128 and 134 (nos. 15 and 16).

35 Bernard 1973, 85–102.

36 The site of the *temple à redans*, as it was called in the original reports and later scholarship; Downey 1988, 65–73; Francfort 1984; Bernard 1971, 414–431.

37 Bernard 1973, 96–99.

38 Francfort/Liger 1976, 25–39; Bernard 1975, 180–189; Mairs 2006, 77–81.

tigious quarter with a greater ratio of stone to mud brick than most other structures.<sup>39</sup> Such evidence strongly suggests that this structure served as the *temenos* of the new royal family of Bactria,<sup>40</sup> christened the »*heroön*« or »*mausolée au caveau de pierre*« although, like the *temenos* of Kineas and the description of the Nikatoreion, it was built as a temple (*naos*). Unlike the *temenos* of Kineas, no inscription survives (if there ever was one) to record who was buried and venerated here. Two structures of similar size were built on the site, and the last was built as an Ionic peripteral temple with a high podium, measuring 29.75 by 20 meters and surrounded with columns standing ca. 6 meters high.<sup>41</sup> The *cella* was divided into a vestibule, a large central room (»*piece 1*«) and smaller room (»*piece 2*«) to the west. Reached by a stairway, two crypts containing burials were arranged underneath these two rooms. Evoking the *temenos* of Kineas, the main crypt related to the smaller room to the west (»*piece 1*«), which suggests some sort of direct connection between what went on in the *cella* above and the crypt below.<sup>42</sup> We do not have the same clear evidence of libations poured into the *cella*, but it is possible that these could have occurred with a cultic precedent readily provided by the *temenos* of Kineas. It is important to leave open the possibility that such libations never occurred and, instead, that rituals patterned more on that of an Olympic god occurred both within and outside the structure, perhaps in emulation of Seleucid practice.

We do not have any information on the resting place of the remains of the legitimate Seleucid kings; however, with the archaeological evidence from Bactria providing solid examples of this process, it is probable that the remains of succeeding and legitimate Seleucid kings joined that of Seleukos I under the Nikatoreion and were duly divinized by their sons. Neither do we have information, textual or archaeological, that can speak to the cultic relationship of the elite of Seleukeia Pieria or the other cities of the Seleucid Tetrapolis with the Nikatoreion; however, the Bactrian *temenoi*, which served a similar purpose and were located in a similar place within the *basileia*, suggest that they likely were the focus of intensive cult activity

39 Dated on the basis of ceramics; see Francfort/Liger 1976, 38.

40 Francfort and Liger hesitated from this conclusion, attempting to make the evidence conform with the scholarly consensus of the independence of Bactria when they were writing (Francfort/Liger, 39), which has progressed considerably since. See Holt 1999. As Mairs points out, it significant that this was the sole structure that retained some continuity after the nomadic destruction of the city, with several later burials deposited after its conquest. Mairs 2006, 80.

41 Francfort/Liger 1976, 31.

42 Bernard 1975, 189. The *temenos* of Kineas: Mairs 2006, 66–76 and 78.

on the part of the royal family and elites of Seleukeia Pieria, if not the entire Seleukis Tetrapolis. Although their cults were formed around once-living beings, the *temenoi* of the deified rulers and the city founder were not located in a separate precinct from, or less grand than, the city's main temple.

Reflecting a greater involvement with South Asia, as well as more cultural complexity, later Indo-Greek kings, such as Menander (ca. mid-second century BCE), evolved hybrid forms of kingship, with South Asian practices blended seamlessly with Hellenistic ones. Menander portrayed himself as a successor of Alexander on his coins while appearing in the Pali text, the *Milindapañha*, as a *dhārmika dharma-rāja*. Plutarch's mention of Menander's burial hints that he engaged both Seleucid and South Asian traditions.<sup>43</sup> According to Plutarch the king's cities' divided his ashes into equal parts and incorporated them into monuments. Like the Seleucid and Bactrian evidence, Menander's remains became incorporated into the monumental and ritual life of his empire, but, rather than a Greek *temenos* and *naos*, it is likely that they were incorporated into Buddhist stupas.

### Middle Iranian Royal Funerary Practice between Macedonian, Persian and Nomadic Traditions

As Seleucid power began to weaken, new powers emerged in the lands of their former empire. Some, like Euthydemid Bactria, were Greek, but others, such as the Orontids of Armenia and Commagene and Mithradatids of Pontos, traced their roots equally to Persian satrapal families and the Seleucid dynasty. Increasingly, regimes founded by Iranian speaking nomads, such as the Arsacids or Kušāns, became the dominant powers. The Middle Iranian period presents evidence from across the lands of the Seleucid empire of Iranian dynasties, or dynasties heavily influenced by Iranian culture, engaging with Macedonian kingship, reinventing half-remembered Persian traditions and incorporating new practices from the Iranian-speaking nomadic steppe.

While evidence of the Indo-Scythian period of India is not abundant, one of the few monuments to survive from this period provides evidence of an introduction of Iranian steppe traditions into those of post-Hellenistic sedentary culture: The Mathura lion inscription, likely a charter for a monastery carved onto red sandstone sculpture, is one of the rare views into Iranian court ritual in India and the melding of steppe, Greek and South

<sup>43</sup> Plut. *Moralia*, 821 D–E.

Asian traditions under the Saka kings. The Lion Capital, »erected in honour of the whole of Sakastan (sarvasa Sak(r)stanasa puyaē)«, names many Saka chiefs and refers to »solemnities over the illustrious king [Maues] and his horse,« (Muki [shr]i raya sashpa [a]bhusavit[a]).<sup>44</sup> In honoring the king Maues and his horse side by side, the inscription possibly alludes to a horse sacrifice. Although these »solemnities« were performed in India, such a funerary ritual had clearer and more immediate cultural roots in Iranian Central Asia than the Vedic *asvamedha*.<sup>45</sup> We have no further information on this burial, though we might reference coeval archaeological evidence of Scythian kurgans as a likely scenario.

The kingdom of Pontos had its roots in the Achaemenid satrapies of Cappadoccia and Phrygia and its dynasty claimed Achaemenid descent. Alexander retained the Persian official whose family had ruled as satraps in the region. After his father ran afoul of Antigonos I Monophthalmos, Mithradates I Ktistes (302 to 266 BCE), the founder of the kingdom, asserted independence and carved out a kingdom in northern Anatolia.<sup>46</sup> The Pontic kings were very much players in the military and diplomatic intrigues of the Hellenistic age and engaged the evolving idiom of Macedonian kingship just as they cultivated their Iranian roots.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, the kings of Pontos created tomb monuments that reinvented and, in a sense, »updated« Persian royal practices. Even though they superficially appear quite Macedonian, they present some of the closest correspondences to Achaemenid royal funerary traditions from the Hellenistic era.

The city of Amaseia served as the royal residence of five Pontic kings between 281 and 180 BCE: Mithridates I, Ariobarzanes, Mithridates II and III, and Pharnakes I. In the vicinity of the royal district (*basileia*), the Pontic

<sup>44</sup> Inscription: see Konow 1929, 30. See Bivar's comments on Dani 1960 on the age of the monument versus the inscription; Bivar 1983, 195.

<sup>45</sup> The tradition of Scythian horse sacrifice is attested in the classical literary tradition (Hdt. 1.216, 4.61, 4.71–75; see Thordarson 1987, 731) as well as widely in the archaeological record (for a recent synthesis of the evidence in the wider context of Iron Age nomadic Eurasia: Koryakova/Epimakhov 2007, 224–229 and 331. Evidence of horse sacrifice at Tilla Tepe further indicates that this was a living reality taking place nearby by closely related cultures versus the more distant ideal of the *asvamedha* in Brāhmaṇic India; Sarianidi 1980, 126; Smith/Doniger 1989; Doniger.

<sup>46</sup> Polyb. 5.43.2; Diod. 19.43.2; 20.11.4; Plut. *Demetr.* 4; Plut. *Mor.* 183 A; App. *Mith.* 9.27–28. Discussion of early history and genealogy: McGing 1986, 13–42; Erciyas 2006, 9–17.

<sup>47</sup> Mithridates VI boasted equally of his royal Persian and Macedonian descent, counting as ancestors Cyrus, Darius, Alexander and Seleukos I: Just. *Epit.* 38.7.1.

kings created rock-cut funerary monuments (μνήματα), which were noted by Strabo, himself a native of Amaseia, in his description of the city.<sup>48</sup> The tombs consisted of rock-cut chambers carved into the rock face with facades revetted with stone and provisioned with columns and architectural members mimicking Greek sacred architecture. While the Greek architectural forms of the tomb facades recall the Macedonian royal tombs of Vergina, their rock-cut chambers set high up on the cliff unmistakably evoke the medium and Iranian religious sensibilities of the Achaemenid tombs, as does evidence of associated ritual. An inscription added to the rock face adjacent to the tomb of Pharnakes alludes to practices intended to honor the gods at the tomb of the king. The inscription records that the *phrourarchos*, Metrodoros, dedicated an altar and a »flower-garden« (ἀνθεῶνα) to the gods for Pharnakes:

ὑπὲρ βασιλέως  
 Φαρνάκου  
 [Μη]τρόδωρος  
 [...]ιου φρουραρο-  
 [χή]σας [τὸ]ν βω=  
 [μ]ὸν καὶ [τ]ὸν  
 ἀνθεῶνα  
 θεοῖς.<sup>49</sup>

While the Pontic kings did not attempt to replicate the Achaemenid tombs, they did appropriate and reconfigure several important and characteristic aspects of Achaemenid funerary practices. The inscription does not directly mention sacrifices; however, the altar ([τὸ]ν βω[μ]ὸν) implies that such ritual activity occurred at the site. Relating to Iranian rather than Macedonian practices, the inscription is clear that they are directed to the gods (θεοῖς) for the benefit of Pharnakes rather than to the king himself. Like the Achaemenid tombs, the Pontic rock-cut tombs would prevent the body of the deceased from polluting any of the elements and would thus be consonant with Iranian purity strictures.<sup>50</sup> The flower garden laid before the tomb corresponds to the idea of placing the king's tomb inside a garden, evoking, albeit on a smaller scale the Achaemenid tomb of Cyrus. The deceased king would thus rest in a symbolic prefiguration of the world made new after the Apocalypse.<sup>51</sup> Although the tombs were located in the cliff face, tunnels or

48 Strab. 12.3.39; Fleischer 2009.

49 Anderson/Cumont/Grégoire 1910, 114–115, no. 94. OGIS 1: 573–575, no. 365.

50 Huff 2004.

51 Lincoln 2003, 142; Lincoln 2007, 67–81.

rock-cut stairs connected each of them with the *basileia*, ensuring that visits to the tombs for ritual purposes would be possible.<sup>52</sup> The Pontic kings used an architectural and linguistic mode of expression that was superficially Greek; however, the concepts and practices were unmistakably drawn from an Iranian repertoire — a repertoire that once was the domain of the Persian court, but at this point in history was being selectively appropriated by a wider Iranian world.<sup>53</sup>

Like the Pontic kings, the royal dynasty of the kingdom of Commagene (162 BCE to 17 CE) had its roots in a Persian dynasty, that of the Orontids; however, as a Seleucid province, Commagene became heavily Hellenized. But Iranian cultural forms regained prominence in the first century BCE as part of a deliberate policy of conservative innovation on the part of the central court to underscore the kingdom's ancient roots that transcended Seleucid, Arsacid or Roman claims in the region. Ruler of one of the last Persian-Macedonian courts of this region to survive the coming of the Romans, Antiochus I (69 to 34 BCE), the kingdom's main innovator in cult and artistic activity, engaged with the forms of the Iranian dynastic sanctuary much like he did with other aspects of Iranian royal expression: within the larger context of his deliberately hybrid Macedonian and Iranian court. Referring to such sanctuaries in Greek as *hierothēsia* (sing. *hierothēsion*) in his inscriptions, the king established dynastic sanctuaries at a number of sites within his kingdom, including the citadel of Arsameia-on-the-Euphrates (Gerger, Adiyaman province, Turkey) and Arsameia-on-the-Nymphaios.<sup>54</sup>

The most elaborate *hierothēsion* was located at the site of Nemrud Dağı, situated on the most prominent mountain in Commagene.<sup>55</sup> The central focus of the site is an artificial tumulus of crushed rocks, which crowned the mountain and encased the king's body. Like the other monuments considered in this study, it shielded the earth and elements from contact with dead human remains, but it did so using a different material. Like the tombs of the female members of the royal family located at Karakuş and Sesönk, the

<sup>52</sup> Fleischer 2009, 111.

<sup>53</sup> After Pharnakes conquered Sinope and made it his royal residence, it is often assumed that Amaseia no longer hosted royal burials. Pompey deposited Mithridates VI's remains in the »tombs of his ancestors,« but we do not learn what the character of these tombs were and it is unclear whether this was actually in Sinope, as Plutarch claims, or in Amaseia (Plut. *Pomp.* 42.3; App. *Mith.* 16.113; Cass. Dio 37.14.1). See Fleischer 2009, 118; Højte 2009, 123–124.

<sup>54</sup> For an overview of these sanctuaries: Facella 2006, 250–297; Canepa 2007; Koch 2002; Wagner 2000; Waldmann 1991.

<sup>55</sup> Sanders 1996.

tumulus evokes nomadic kurgans more than any Achaemenid tomb. Two terraces flanked the eastern and western side providing two focal points for cult activity. While the architectural, sculptural and ritual forms of the *hierothēsion* more often than not depart from Persian precedent, Antiochos understood that he was adhering to Persian tradition. The 8 meter high statues portraying king Antiochos, the Tyche of Commagene and its chief gods were enthroned wearing »Persian robes«, looking out over the lands of the kingdom below. The cult *nomos* that the king instituted honors the gods, himself, and secondarily his Persian and Macedonian ancestors.<sup>56</sup> He explicitly states that, year in and year out, the priests must wear »Persian robes«, in order to enact the cult activities, which take place according to similar, »ancestral custom.«<sup>57</sup> In setting aside an endowment for the site and calling for the chief priest to, »keep watch at this memorial and devote himself to the care and the proper adornment of these sacred images«, the *nomos* broadly recalls the Achaemenid institution of tomb caretakers as recorded in the Elamite tablets, though the overall structure of the cult, and the site's artistic and architectural forms belong solidly in the post-Achaemenid world.<sup>58</sup>

### The Monuments of the Arsacid and Sasanian Kings of Kings

Under the Arsacid and Sasanian rulers of Iran we have evidence that a new royal memorial tradition emerges, that of dedicating a sacred fire to the memory of the king of kings and his family. The Arsacids and Sasanians appear to adapt the ritual activity of a Zoroastrian cult of fire to serve the royal memorial needs.

Parthian Nisa (\**Miθradātkirt*), the first imperial capital of the Arsacid dynasty of Iran (ca. 250 BCE to ca. 226 CE) presents some source evidence of the dynasty's royal funerary traditions.<sup>59</sup> The Arsacids supposedly embalmed the bodies of their kings and laid them in mausoleums, which, according to Isidore of Charax, were located at Nisa.<sup>60</sup> However, no archaeo-

<sup>56</sup> *Nomos* 67.

<sup>57</sup> *Nomos* 67 and 132.

<sup>58</sup> *Nomos* 124.

<sup>59</sup> Final publication: Invernizzi 2009. See Invernizzi/Lippolis 2008 and Invernizzi 2010. On the related problem of an Arsacid ruler cult: Dąbrowa 2009 and Muccioli 2009.

<sup>60</sup> Isid. Char. *Mans. Parth.* 12. According to Dio Cassius, in 216 the Roman emperor Caracalla plundered the Arsacid royal tombs in Arbela and scattered the bones; however, no Arsacid king is known to have built a city or fortress here. It is thus

logical evidence of these tombs have been discovered at Nisa. It could be that the tombs were located elsewhere at a yet undiscovered site in the vicinity or all trace of them lost. Some of the early Soviet excavators initially hypothesized that Nisa's »Round Hall« served as a mausoleum dedicated to an important member of the Arsacid dynasty.<sup>61</sup> This 17 meter diameter domed, mud brick structure, belonged to a later building phase and was linked to the site's main palatial structure by corridors and three passages.<sup>62</sup> However, no funerary materials, no sarcophagus, no evidence of other mortuary practices were discovered to prove that the Arsacid tombs were associated with this structure making it is more likely that the structure was associated with dynastic cult rather than direct funerary activity.

While the Arsacid tombs still await discovery, documents from the site indicate that the practice of dedicating a sacred fire *pad ruwān*, that is, »for the soul« of the king or for his family members was a current practice in Parthian Nisa.<sup>63</sup> Ostraka from Nisa document delivery of goods from the estates that supported such a foundation, and the inclusion of Mithradates I's name as the dedicatee indicates that he or his relatives endowed the cult for his own memory and the benefit of his soul.<sup>64</sup> The intention of this foundation is broadly similar to the Achaemenid material in its aim of encouraging ritual activity that would benefit the soul of the king; however, whether this was linearly related to Achaemenid practices (the less likely scenario) or eastern Zoroastrian practices is not entirely clear. Without any other information on the fire, one can only speculate on its relationship to the structures at Nisa. Echoing their dynastic cousins, textual evidence indicates that fires or altars were located at the site of the royal tombs of the Arsacid kings of Armenia in Ani.<sup>65</sup> His troubled chronology notwithstanding, according to the late antique Armenian historian Movses Khorenats'i, a king named »Tigran« built an altar over the tomb his brother at Bagawan, the site of the »Fire of Ohrmazd«, where the Arsacid dynasty of Armenia would celebrate New Years.<sup>66</sup>

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more likely that the tombs at Arbela were, in fact, the tombs of the vassal dynasty of Adiabene, again reflecting the Arsacid conventions; Cass. Dio 71.26 and 74.1. See Hansman 1987.

61 Košelenko 1977, 57–64; Košelenko et al. 2002; Krašeninnikova/Pugačenkova 1964; Invernizzi/Lippolis 2008, 7 and 382.

62 Invernizzi/Lippolis 2008, 7–81.

63 Boyce 1987.

64 Boyce 1987.

65 Agathangelos 785 (tr. Thomson 1976).

66 Movses Khorenats'i 2.55 (tr. Thomson 2006, 195); 2.66 (tr. Thomson 2006, 209).

While the Sasanians (226 to 651 CE) sought to supplant the Arsacids and reawaken the royal traditions of their Persian *ancestors*, many of their kingship practices paralleled, if not directly appropriated, Parthian practices.<sup>67</sup> Given the early dynasty's interest in Achaemenid sites, rituals and discourse, as well as their role as raw material many aspects of their early culture, it is not surprising that the early Sasanians engaged the Achaemenid past in their funerary and monumental activity.<sup>68</sup> The site of Naqš-e Rostam presents a large volume of archaeological evidence of mortuary and funerary remains from both the Achaemenid and Sasanian eras. In addition to his monumental rock relief, located in between two Achaemenid tombs, Šāpūr I (240 to 270 CE) carved an inscription on the Ka'ba-ye Zardošt, the site's Achaemenid tower. This extensive inscription (ŠKZ) provides an epigraphic record of his foundation of fires and cult for himself, his family, his ancestors and a vast number of courtiers.<sup>69</sup> Broadly paralleling both Arsacid and Achaemenid evidence, this inscription established a cult for the benefit of his soul based around veneration of sacred fires.<sup>70</sup> Evidence from the other inscriptions at Naqš-e Rostam indicates that the cult took place at the site, if not directly on or around the Ka'ba-ye Zardošt, and quite likely in close physical proximity to his remains.<sup>71</sup> While he did not (and could not) recreate Achaemenid cult, Šāpūr I physically anchored this newly founded protocol on the Achaemenid tower and constructed the ritual itself with inspiration from ancient Persian royal traditions. The Sasanian protocol, calling for sacrifice of a sheep, bread, and wine, closely parallels the Elamite tablets from the Persepolis Fortification Archive which record rations for the upkeep of the funerary monuments (*šumar*) of the Achaemenid kings and cult rendered at them for the benefit of the king's soul.

### Conclusions

The political and cultural upheavals following Alexander's invasions ensured that Achaemenid royal practices were imperfectly remembered and not replicated in an unchanged and uninterrupted manner. After Alexander, Achaemenid kingship lost its currency as a primary expression of power among both Macedonians and Iranians. No king in the post-Achaemenid

<sup>67</sup> Börm 2008.

<sup>68</sup> Canepa 2010c.

<sup>69</sup> ŠKZ, 33–50 (Huyse 1999).

<sup>70</sup> Canepa 2010c, 582–84.

<sup>71</sup> Canepa 2010c, 583.

lands cared to represent himself using the artistic forms and conventions of the Achaemenid court. Macedonian kingship, especially as innovated by the Seleucid court, had taken precedence.

While they shared the common influence of Hellenistic culture and the dimming memory of Persian royal practice, the Middle Iranian responses to these ancient and contemporary influences varied greatly. The Seleucids, Graeco-Bactrians and Indo-Greeks created monuments that responded at once to Macedonian charismatic kingship<sup>72</sup> while integrating the cult of the king into the monumental and ritual life of kingdoms where indigenous forms of power were increasingly important. The kings of Pontos and Commagene both understood themselves to descend on their paternal line from the Achaemenid satrapal families. Like their cultures of kingship in general, their funerary practices responded to their Mediterranean and Iranian competitors as well as dimming Achaemenid precedents in varying measures. Interestingly, while the funerary monuments of Orontid Commagene explicitly referenced this *»Persian«* tradition, claiming to recreate it, their actual practices did not bear much direct resemblance to those of the Achaemenids. Although we do not have a great deal of corroborating evidence, one might argue that the Orontid funerary cult, with its king honored as a god, bore a greater resemblance to Seleucid traditions. In contrast, the architectural forms of the Pontic tombs are superficially Greek; however, the overall pattern of their funerary monuments (rock cut tombs, associated garden) coheres quite a bit more closely with Achaemenid practices. In a sense, Orontid Commagene *»reinvented«* Persian tradition, while Mithradatid Pontos Hellenized their Persian traditions.

Similarly, the traditions of the Arsacids and Sasanians mark a point of rupture in terms of the introduction of a sacred fire but continuity in terms of the general understanding of the sacrifice as intended for the soul for the king. Sites in Arsacid Iran and Armenia likely incorporated the use of cult statues into such rituals, though the king himself was not honored thus. While fire was the sole cultic focus under the Sasanians, the actual Achaemenid sites and remains were integral in reinforcing the perception of continuity, even if, in actual fact, what they produced was quite innovative.

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<sup>72</sup> Gehrke 1982; Frye 1964.

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